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ETUCE statement on digitisation, employability and inclusiveness

Adopted by the ETUCE Committee on 23 October 2017

The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) represents 132 education unions and 11 million teachers in 50 countries of Europe. ETUCE is a Social Partner in education at the EU level and a European Trade Union Federation within ETUC, the European Trade Union Confederation. ETUCE is the European Region of Education International, the global federation of education unions.

The Directorate-General Communications Networks, Content & Technology of the European Commission (DG CONNECT) published in May 2017 a report on [‘digitisation, employability and inclusiveness’](#).

ETUCE welcomes this report as it addresses important topics set forth in the [‘ETUCE Policy Paper on the 21st Century Teaching Profession and the Use of ICT’](#) as well as tackling relevant aspects for the teaching profession within the 2030 United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. Notwithstanding, ETUCE would like to point out several issues to consider as regards the challenges and opportunities of digitisation for teachers, academics and other educational personnel:

- **Digitisation:**

- 1) **Education is a fundamental human right and a public good.** Access to appropriate ICTs in education must be considered an entitlement. ETUCE considers that the use of ICT at all levels of education can be a powerful tool for promoting equity in educational opportunities if it is effectively implemented. The critical issue is **bridging the digital divide, ensuring that all learners benefit from ICT as a tool for their learning.**
- 2) **State education policies must be built on inclusive education.** ETUCE warns that **digital business and economic technological approaches are extremely harmful regarding ICT for inclusive education, contributing to indirect privatisation and commercialisation of education and deepening social, gender, economic, cultural and geographical inequalities.**
- 3) **ETUCE embraces the positive approach of the use of ICT in education.** Teachers, school leaders, academics and other education personnel need to acquire and improve their digital skills and knowledge that are better adapted to the new and increasing digital expectations and demands of students, both for the preparation to the labour market and for lifelong learning. This remains challenging at all levels of education. ETUCE underlines that **education trade unions play a key role in helping identify teachers, academics and other education personnel’s own ICT training needs in addition to demanding national education authorities to take their responsibility for ensuring that teachers and other education personnel are fully prepared for the use of ICT in teaching and learning.**

- 4) **The effective use of ICT in teaching and assessment must help limit and reduce the administrative burden of teachers, academics and other education personnel with a view to making more time available for teaching and the interaction between education professionals and their students.** ETUCE notes that the use of new technologies and digital tools can imply workload and additional working time for teachers, academics and other educational personnel. In this respect, **ETUCE highlights the key role of education trade unions in guarding against a possible increase in workload arising from digitisation and in advocating for the highest occupational safety and health standards, working-conditions and social protection for teachers, academics and other education personnel within the context of the definition and implementing of new policies aiming at the development of 21st-century digital skills and competencies.**
- 5) **ETUCE agrees that ICT is an added value to teaching and learning in the fast-changing digital world.** However, businesses and education authorities often understand digitisation only as an opportunity for economic potential and employability. They disregard the benefits in relation to inclusive educational approaches and to the promotion of social inclusion and equal opportunities for all. **ETUCE emphasise the importance of [successful pedagogical approaches through the use of ICT for inclusion](#)¹,** for example to foster democratic digital citizenship.
- 6) ETUCE recalls that digital devices or media are not the aim *per se*, they are only one out of many teaching tools. In any event, **the use of ICT for digital education (e.g. Open Educational Resources) must serve to reinforce the professional autonomy of teachers, academics and educational staff and to respect the pedagogical and educational purposes of the teaching activity concerned.** For example, MOOCs may be effective in adult and further education; they may not necessarily produce the same result in other education institutions where digital education should be integrated via blended learning. Education institutions are the only mandatory setting where students learn socially to interact with each other and with their teachers.
- **Employability:**
- 7) **Investing in digital skills in education is essential.** However, digitisation is often seen as an opportunity for business development and the role of **ICT for digital training, lifelong learning and professional development as well as for driving innovative teaching methods and techniques at all levels of education is often neglected.** In this context, ETUCE believes that initial and continuous ICT professional development for teachers, academics and other educational personnel is essential and must be **built on sustainable and adequate public investment. It is the position of ETUCE that education trade unions are social partners in the implementation of innovation in education through social dialogue and must be consulted** on the introduction and utilisation of new technologies and ICT in all levels of education.
- 8) ETUCE recalls that **access to integrated high quality initial training and continuous professional development, including ICT, for all teachers, academics and other education personnel throughout their careers is one of the aspects that makes the**

¹ Please, see also ETUCE projects: [ELFE 1-European e-Learning Forum for Education](#), [ELFE-2 European e-Learning Forum for Education](#), and [ELF-ESL: Teacher Unions Preventing Early School Leaving Through the Use of ICT in Education](#).

teaching profession more attractive at all levels of education so as to prepare digitally confident and supportive teachers, academics and other educational personnel at all levels of education.

9) ETUCE welcomes the idea of **enhancing the gender perspective of digitalisation**. In this regard, ETUCE observes that women are significantly less represented in STEM-Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics related academic and educational fields. Elimination of the gender gap in STEM subjects is crucial. ETUCE underlines that targeted efforts are needed to attract girls and women into STEM sectors which offer good job perspectives **as well as attracting boys and men into social subjects and career paths, such as teaching**. **ETUCE considers that reducing career segregation and fair and better work-life balance policies are crucial to foster female participation in the labour market and more diverse teacher force.**

- **Inclusiveness:**

10) Inclusion is a core philosophy underpinning education. In addition to ICT continuous training, ETUCE underlines also the importance that teachers, academics and other educational personnel need to be better equipped to use **specific ICTs** (e.g. adaptive or assistive devices) **in order to effectively teach students with special educational needs, in particular, via appropriate academic training (e.g. specific ICT for inclusion)**, so that they can be effectively supported in their use of ICT **as a tool for personalised learning in inclusive settings** at all levels of education.

11) **Inclusive and ICT barrier-free learning environments must be promoted at all levels of education**. ICT for information accessibility in learning for all is essential for equitable lifelong learning and equal opportunities, in particular, for those disadvantaged learners. ETUCE emphasises that ICT for information accessibility in learning must include text, image, audio, and video accessibility for all, **making all ICT learning material compliant with accessibility standards**, including accessibility support and resources. ETUCE supports **the usage of ICT for inclusion as a tool for supporting personalised learning needs and promoting individual learning opportunities**.

12) **Training opportunities in ICT for inclusion need to raise all professionals' awareness about the importance of preparing all students for a changing world in which digitisation is central**. The professionals' commitment to developing their own digital literacy as well as the digital competences of all learners is crucial. ETUCE remarks that students need to develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills as well as creativity and a sense of social justice and equity to better understand and face the challenges and opportunities of the worldwide globalisation (e.g. the impact of automatisisation, the use of social media and networks, mis-information, etc). Hence, ETUCE observes that the incorporation of safe ICT use issues ('e-safety') into the wider teaching of social and digital literacy with all learners is vital for their personal and professional development in changing digital societies.